



Media Release

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Army takes action against summer wildfires

SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, Hawaii — As summer approaches, Army officials are taking proactive steps to prevent fires on the Schofield Barracks training range during the hotter, drier months ahead.

U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii (USAG-HI) Range Development and Management Committee and the 84th Engineer Battalion, 8th Military Police Brigade, have spent the last three months removing brush and trees around existing range firebreaks and improving roads throughout the range complex to provide better access for firefighters and emergency personnel.

Together, these efforts support the Army's plan to conduct its annual prescribed burn of the Schofield Barracks training range complex this month.

Officials with USAG-HI's Directorate of Emergency Services (DES), Fire Division are planning to conduct the prescribed burn, May 26 through May 31, to reduce overall fire danger in the area.

Safety is the garrison's number one priority, and the prescribed burn will improve safety by removing highly flammable guinea grass and other vegetation. If left unchecked, these grasses become large fuel sources for wildfires that can be difficult to contain and threaten area resources.

The Army's plan for the prescribed burn lays out a deliberate and phased strategy for conducting operations.

“We're planning to burn between 1,200 and 1,600 acres, but we're not going to burn it all at once. We plan to conduct the burn systematically, by small areas, over the course of six days,” said Chief Scotty Freeman, DES Fire Division Chief, USAG-HI.

The team will conduct final checks, May 25, to ensure all of the personnel, equipment and safeguards are in place and ready. The actual burn will begin May 26, provided weather conditions such as wind, temperature and fuel moisture are within the regulatory parameters.

“If the conditions are not optimal we won't burn,” said Col. Mark Jackson, Director of Emergency Services, explaining that the garrison must follow Army, State and Federal requirements when conducting a prescribed burn.

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The prescribed burn is structured so that the team will ignite, burn and extinguish fires in pre-designated areas each day, starting at the firebreak road and working inward. This strategy will create extended low-vegetation areas to help contain the prescribed burn area.

All burn operations will take place during daylight hours, and firefighters with DES' Fire Division will remain on site each night to monitor the area.

Coordination is critical for an event like this, according to Freeman.

Multiple personnel from USAG-HI, the Federal Fire Department, the 8th Theater Sustainment Command, and the 25th Infantry Division are supporting the burn effort, to include firefighters, aviators, engineers, and natural and cultural resources specialists.

The Army has also coordinated with the Hawaii State Department of Health's Clean Air Branch and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who have both reviewed and approved the prescribed burn plan.

Freeman estimates that effective prescribed burns can reduce wildfire outbreaks by as much as 75 percent, making them an important tool to wildfire prevention.